

135 South Van Buren Street

MIHP # M: 26-10-96

135 South Van Buren Street
Rockville, Montgomery County, MD

Constructed between 1948-1949

Private Access

The house at 135 South Van Buren Street is a one-story house in red-painted cinderblock with a brick chimney and a flat slightly pitched roof. It is nestled into its sloping, wooded site on a quiet residential street. It is located within the corporate limits of the town of Rockville, in Montgomery County, Maryland, approximately one mile east of the I-270 corridor and five miles north of the Capital Beltway. In a city with little other modern residential architecture dating from the 1940s, this residence stands out as the early work of a renowned master architect and urbanist, Chloethiel Woodard Smith. Smith used the elements of modern architecture to design one of a small group of custom-designed modern homes built in Metropolitan Washington, D.C. in the 1940s. Smith's house did not attempt to recall a past style; rather it expressed a new domestic vision through clean lines and simple materials. Broad overhangs, large and numerous windows, streamlined detailing, and efficient use of space characterize its style.

The house is fifty-five feet long by twenty-two feet and four inches in length overall. The exterior is of cinderblock painted red with white wooden trim around the windows and wooden siding where the block meets the roof. The foundation is of cinderblock with concrete for the fireplace. The roof is flat with a very slight pitch to shed the rain. It has a broad overhanging eave in the back, sheltering the gardenside window wall, and is covered with a gravel surface contained by metal flashing. The fireplace and chimney are made of red brick.

The windows are steel casements painted white; their size and shape are those specified by Smith in her plans, created in 1948. There is a small, enclosed storage shed off the south side of the house built in the same materials and connected by a roof overhang that covers a narrow walkway to the backyard. This portion looks as if it is original to the 1949 construction but does not appear on Smith's 1948 drawings.

The plan is divided in two major sections: the public living, dining, and kitchen area, and the private bedroom spaces. The footprint consists of two simple rectangles joined at an overlapping corner. Smith was able to maximize the views from the house by placing the home at an angle to the road, contrary to the traditional placement of homes parallel to the street. This diagonal placement also enabled Smith to maximize the length of the house on its narrow lot.

The house at 135 South Van Buren Street is significant under Criterion C as a representation of the early work of a master architect and as an early example of modernist, single family residential design in Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Chloethiel Woodard Smith created a particularly successful example of the small suburban home, economically built and planned. This design showcases the talents of the young architect, who would later become a key player in redeveloping the capital city. It combines tenets of the International Style and ideals of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian homes into an economical, efficient home. The house remains relatively unaltered from its initial condition, making it a compelling example of modern architecture in Maryland.

The following National Register of Historic Places form was prepared for inventory documentation purposes only; the property has not been nominated to the National Register.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name 135 South Van Buren Street

other names _____

2. Location

street & number 135 South Van Buren Street

☐ not for publication

city or town Rockville

☐ vicinity

state Maryland code MD county Montgomery code 031 zip code 20850

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ Determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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5. Classification**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

1

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement/

International Style/Wrightian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

Concrete Block

walls

Concrete Block

roof

Other: Tar & gravel

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

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Description Summary:

The house at 135 South Van Buren Street is a one-story house in red-painted cinderblock with a brick chimney and a flat slightly pitched roof (Figure 1). It is nestled into its sloping, wooded site on a quiet residential street. It is located within the corporate limits of the town of Rockville, in Montgomery County, Maryland, approximately one mile east of the I-270 corridor and five miles north of the Capital Beltway. In a city with little other modern residential architecture dating from the 1940s, this residence stands out as the early work of a renowned master architect and urbanist, Chloethiel Woodard Smith. Smith used the elements of modern architecture to design one of a small group of custom-designed modern homes built in Metropolitan Washington, D.C in the 1940s. Smith's house did not attempt to recall a past style; rather it expressed a new domestic vision through clean lines and simple materials. Broad overhangs, large and numerous windows, streamlined detailing, and efficient use of space characterize its style.

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General Description:

The house at 135 South Van Buren Street is a one-story cinderblock house located within the corporate limits of the town of Rockville, in Montgomery County, Maryland, approximately one mile east of the I-270 corridor and five miles north of the Capital Beltway. The 956 square foot house and 13,384 square foot lot are nestled into a quiet suburban residential street. The neighboring houses are traditional single family structures, many of them with classical detailing. Thus, this house is distinguished from its neighbors by its modest and modern appearance of simple materials, clean lines, and absence of decoration. The low-lying home is unassuming, its southeast corner set back forty feet from the street. The house is set diagonally on a wooded lot containing mature, deciduous trees. The lot slopes fourteen feet from the street level to the rear lot line. Flagstone pavers create a walkway linking the parking area and shed to the front door of the house; in the back yard, flagstone pavers form a piano-shaped terrace outside the window wall of the living room. Both front and back yards currently feature a groundcover of English ivy.

The house is fifty-five feet long by twenty-two feet and four inches in length overall. The exterior is of cinderblock painted red with white wooden trim around the windows and wooden siding where the block meets the roof (Figure 2). The foundation is of cinderblock with concrete for the fireplace. The roof is flat with a very slight pitch to shed the rain. It has a broad overhanging eave in the back, sheltering the gardenside window wall, and is covered with a gravel surface contained by metal flashing. The fireplace and chimney are made of red brick. The windows are steel casements painted white; their size and shape are those specified by Smith in her plans, created in 1948. There is a small, enclosed storage shed off the south side of the house built in the same materials and connected by a roof overhang that covers a narrow walkway to the backyard. This portion looks as if it is original to the 1949 construction but does not appear on Smith's 1948 drawings.

The plan is divided in two major sections: the public living, dining, and kitchen area, and the private bedroom spaces. The footprint consists of two simple rectangles joined at an overlapping corner (Plate 1). Smith was able to maximize the views from the house by placing the home at an angle to the road, contrary to the traditional placement of homes parallel to the street. This diagonal placement also enabled Smith to maximize the length of the house on its narrow lot.

Facades:

East (front) Façade:

The main entrance of the house faces east to Van Buren Street (Figure 1). The structure sits below the level of the street, nestled into the site. The central brick chimneystack that measures sixteen feet in length dominates the façade. The two remaining portions of the house are organized around this unifying element. The overall east façade is fifty-five feet and four inches in length (not including the southern storage room), with the

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projecting bedroom section twenty-two feet long and the living room thirty-three feet overall. To the north of the chimney is the main entrance sheltered by a roof overhang, delineating the separation of private and public space within the house. North of the entrance is a small door to the heater, which is accessible from both the interior and exterior. The cinderblock façade painted in a deep red hue begins again to the north of this door, denoting the bathroom with a small, two-pane casement window, and a bedroom with a larger, four-pane casement window. To the south of the chimney there are two casement windows with three panes each, two operable and one stationary in the center. These windows correspond to the living room and kitchen space. The windowless southernmost part of the east façade consists of the attached storage room and covered walkway connecting the two parts of the house.

North Façade:

The north façade measures twenty-two feet in length. The roof rises to the west and there are large overhangs on both the east and west ends of the façade, though none projecting over the north façade itself. Where the roof rises, Smith used horizontal wood siding to create the transition from cement block to the roof. There are two windows, one taller casement with two operable vertical panes and a horizontal, stationary pane at the top; the other window has three vertical panes, two operable on the sides and one stationary in the center (Figure 3).

West Façade:

This façade, unlike the east, front façade, opens up to the exterior through the use of larger windows and a window wall (Figure 4). Like the east façade, it is fifty-five feet, four inches in length. The northernmost window is nine feet, eight inches in length and made up of three parts. Smith created this unit by pairing two windows that have two operable panes side by side and one stationary pane on top, with a simpler single paned window with the same smaller horizontal pane on top. This creates a large opening from the larger bedroom to the backyard. The next window has two operable vertical panes topped with the inoperable smaller pane and it opens up from the living room. The dominant feature of the west façade is the window-wall created by Smith (Figure 5). The window-wall is fifteen feet four inches in length and was created by pairing two glazed door units with a large piece of plate glass. The entire west façade has an overhang that is two feet, four inches deep. The overhang is extended in front of the window-wall to about four feet. This helps to shade the interior from the late-day sun and shelters an area of the yard that is covered with pavers (Figure 6). South of the window-wall is a window that serves the kitchen; it is the same type of window as the one north of the living room. The covered walkway between the house and storage room is also visible on the west façade, just south of the kitchen. There is one opening on the west façade of the storage room where the cement block wall meets the roofline. It may have been a window previously, but it currently serves as an opening for an air duct.

South Façade:

The south façade has two layers: the exterior wall of the kitchen and the south wall of the storage room, both exterior surfaces. The kitchen wall has two windows and a door. Smith labeled the windows as "basement windows" on her plans; they are small, single paned, inoperable windows. These small horizontal windows are

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placed above and below the wall mounted cabinets and provide light for the small kitchen (Figure 7). The door provides secondary access to the exterior and to the connecting storage room.

The exterior of the storage room is a blank wall approximately fourteen feet in length. The angle of the sloping roof can be seen as the roof drops in height from the west side of the home to the east. The added height in the west façade allows more light to enter into the master bedroom and living room that face west to the back yard. The only elements added to the south façade are two meters for gas and water and the house number 135 (Figure 8).

Landscaping:

There is a fourteen-foot decline in height from the street level to the back of the lot. Flagstone pavers were used to create a walkway linking the parking area to the front of the house. Aside from the pavers in the backyard outside the window wall, there is no clear indication that Smith designed the landscape for the property. The front and back yards are currently dominated by ivy that covers the ground. All over the site are mature, deciduous trees (Figures 1 & 4).

Interior:

The interior consists of two moderately sized bedrooms with ample closet space, a full bathroom, a linen closet, coat closet, living-dining space, and a kitchen. The simple, clean lines of the interior match those of the exterior. The house lacks door and window surrounds and crown moldings or plinths where the walls meet the floor. Smith designed the built-in bookcases for the living room, a china cabinet for the dining room, and the cabinetry for the kitchen. A special addition Smith devised for the simple china cabinet and kitchen counter was a small opening with a sliding door that allows utensils and food to be passed from the kitchen to the living room (Plate 2). This type of pass through element is found in many modern homes of the period. This was one of the well thought out elements of Smith's design that show her extreme attention to detail and planning. Each room in the house has two exterior walls and Smith's use of large windows allows cross ventilation in all rooms.

The use of finely detailed built in furniture in a small house is reminiscent of the Arts and Crafts movement of the turn of the century. The idea of a house as a "complete work of art" is visible in Smith's personal selection of windows and construction materials, down to the joints of wooden cabinets. The unassuming fireplace, approximately three feet by three feet does not have a mantle. The house is heated with a gas-fired furnace, which was originally housed in the room adjacent to the bathroom.

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1949

Significant Dates

1949

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation**Architect/Builder**

Chloethiel Woodard Smith

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: University of Maryland, School of Architecture, Preservation & Planning;
American Institute of Architects, Octagon Museum,
Chloethiel Woodard Smith Collection

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The house at 135 South Van Buren Street is significant under Criterion C as a representation of the early work of a master architect and as an early example of modernist, single family residential design in Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Chloethiel Woodard Smith created a particularly successful example of the small suburban home, economically built and planned. This design showcases the talents of the young architect, who would later become a key player in redeveloping the capital city. It combines tenets of the International Style and ideals of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian homes into an economical, efficient home. The house remains relatively unaltered from its initial condition, making it a compelling example of modern architecture in Maryland.

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Resource History and Historic Context:

Chloethiel Woodard Smith

Chloethiel Woodard Smith is a very significant modernist architect, whose life and career have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve. Chloethiel Blanche Woodard was born in 1910 in Peoria, Illinois, and lived to be eighty-two years old. She received her Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Oregon in 1932 and a "Master of Architecture in City Planning" from Washington University in 1933.¹ Her master's thesis was titled "An Industrial Housing Community for the City of St. Louis, Missouri."² Smith studied under housing reformers Henry Wright and Ernest Kahn at Washington University, and in 1935 she moved to the Washington metropolitan area. She first worked for the government in the Federal Housing Administration, and was eventually appointed Chief Architect and Chief of Planning for FHA's Large Scale Housing Division. In 1939, Smith co-curated with noted modernist architect Albert Kastner an exhibition on the plan of Washington called "Washington, Planned City Without a Plan."³ The two worked with seven other young "forward thinking" architects "appealing for a reappraisal of current city planning policy" in and around the District of Columbia.⁴ The exhibit contended that the National Capital Park and Planning Commission was focusing too much on the Federal City core while neglecting the broader needs of inner city residents. The group wanted to call national attention to local conditions and "turn the city back over to its citizens."⁵ The exhibit stirred much controversy at the local level, receiving both criticism and praise, and made Chloethiel Woodard Smith a public figure. Woodard's passion for progressive planning did not go unnoticed. Through the entire course of her career, she expounded the beliefs that were at the core of the exhibition.⁶

In the early 1940s, Chloethiel Blanche Woodard married Bromley K. Smith. She traveled through South America on a Guggenheim Fellowship and taught architecture in La Paz, Bolivia where her husband was posted in 1944 as a Foreign Service officer. Her work in La Paz won her honors from the local architectural community and in 1948 she was appointed chairman of the AIA Committee on Pan-American Affairs. Smith

¹ McGroarty, Jane and Susana Torre. "New Professional Identities: Four Women in the Sixties." in *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*. Edited by Susana Torre. New York: Whitney Library of Design. 1977, 115.

² Jayne Lisabeth Doud. "Chloethiel Woodard Smith, FAIA: Washington Urban Gem." Thesis, University of Oregon. March 1994, 4.

³ Bushong, William. *A Centennial History of the Washington Chapter: The American Institute of Architects*. Washington: The Washington Architectural Foundation Press. 1987, 94.

⁴ Doud, 34.

⁵ Gerald G. Gross. "City Pattern Long Obsolete, They Say." *The Washington Post*. Oct. 8, 1939. p. B5.

⁶ Doud, 41.

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was also selected to design the embassy in Asuncion, Paraguay.⁷ The Smiths returned to Washington in 1946 and Chloethiel joined the progressive firm of Berla and Abel where she worked on designs for apartment buildings for the firm. Among her co-workers were Arthur H. Keyes, Francis Donald Lethbridge, and Nicholas Satterlee, three influential architects who became her partners in the 1950s.⁸

Chloethiel opened her own firm in 1963, naming it Chloethiel Woodard Smith & Associated Architects. The press noticed the success of her firm, which became a training ground for young architects in the Washington area.⁹ Smith ran the firm until she retired in 1982. Her impact on the city and the face of modern corporate and residential architecture was significant and her works are found in both metropolitan and suburban contexts. Chloethiel Woodard Smith earned the reputation as one of America's "most influential architects in mid-century classic modern architecture."¹⁰ She has been described as "the most successful woman architect of her time" and she was the first woman to serve on a *Progressive Architecture* Awards Jury.¹¹

Chloethiel Woodard Smith designed a few isolated single-family homes, mostly at the beginning of her career, and 135 South Van Buren Street, which, as far as we know, was never published, is the earliest example we have been able to record. A subsequent design that attracted media attention was the Chain Bridge Road House for *House Beautiful* in 1951 that also incorporated a floor to ceiling window wall.¹² Her expertise in the field of home design was such that she served as director for the Housing Research Foundation in 1951 and was active in the affiliated organization, the Southwest Research Institute.¹³ In 1953, *House and Home* magazine published photographs of one of her (unidentified) projects in an article showcasing good planning and design, another measure of her reputation.¹⁴

Smith was instrumental in reshaping Washington during the urban renewal era of the 1950s and 1960s, designing award winning apartment and office buildings all over the District of Columbia. In 1952, her radical plan to redevelop Southwest Washington (designed in association with her older colleague Louis Justement, a well-known residential architect) was selected by the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA). This was the first urban renewal plan officially endorsed in the United States.¹⁵ The RLA was looking for a bold plan that would

⁷ Loeffler, Jane. *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. 1998. p. 151.

⁸ Bushong, 88-89.

⁹ Von Eckardt, Wolf. "That Exceptional One: Chloethiel Woodard Smith Made it Because She Was Very Good," *The Washingtonian*. September 1988. p. 79.

¹⁰ Westbrook, Richard. *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Potomac Place*. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. January 22, 2003. Section 8, p. 3.

¹¹ "Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Obituary," *Progressive Architecture*. March 1993, v. 74, p. 21.

¹² Conroy, Sarah Booth. "Sketches of a Designing Woman: Architect Chloethiel Woodard Smith, Leaving Her Mark on Washington." *The Washington Post*. November 11, 1989, G1.

¹³ Christopher Martin. "Tract-House Modern: A Study of Housing Design and Consumption in the Washington Suburbs, 1946-1960." Dissertation, George Washington University. January 30, 2000. p. 169.

¹⁴ "How to Plan and Sell Your Next House." *House and Home*. May 1953, v. 3, p. 137.

¹⁵ Westbrook, 4.

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provide an alternative to the flight of the middle class to the suburbs. In the end, the Justement/Smith plan was not implemented, but it played a major role in convincing investors that Southwest D.C. could be successfully redeveloped for modern uses.¹⁶ Smith's modernist but sensible ideas on urban residential living are evidenced in projects across the capital city. She was always concerned with the proper provision of green space, and the layout of her apartment and townhouse units make them particularly livable and functional.

According to Antoinette J. Lee, Smith's Capitol Park (1959-1963), which included both apartment buildings and town houses, was the "pioneer housing cluster in the Southwest redevelopment area," which "secured [her] reputation" and made her "the designer of choice for subsequent projects in Southwest Washington." Capitol Park received a National AIA Award of Merit in 1960 and facilitated Smith's election to the AIA College of Fellows, the sixth woman to be so honored.¹⁷ Renamed Potomac Place, the cluster has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places on the basis of its architectural merits and for its significance in the history of the mid 20th century urban renewal movement in Washington, D.C. Smith's other local works include Rockville's Chestnut Lodge therapy building for children (1955), Waterview Townhouses overlooking Reston's Lake Anne (1962-1965),¹⁸ Harbour Square, an apartment building in Southwest Washington (1965-1967), and the National Airport Metro station (1971).¹⁹ She also designed LaClede Town (1962-1965) in St. Louis, a middle-income project including 680 units, which fostered in its racially mixed inhabitants a strong sense of pride in their community.²⁰

One of Smith's many achievements was designing three of the four buildings at the prominent intersection of Connecticut Avenue and L Street, N.W. in downtown Washington. These are 1100 Connecticut Avenue, N.W. (begun 1964), the Blake Building, 1025 Connecticut Ave (begun 1964), and Washington Square (completed in 1987), praised as "the most exceptional modern building in Washington."²¹ This area is referred to as "Chloethiel's Corner."

In June 1964, Smith was hired by the National Capitol Planning Commission to suggest ways of remodeling Washington's skyline. She produced a thirty-one-page report in which she suggested increasing building heights at selected points, such as Dupont and Logan Circles, as well as creating "vertical communities" for residential use.²² The plan would also have turned Sixteenth Street into a major approach for the historic city. Her report was considered advisory and Smith wished only to improve upon L'Enfant's plan for the city. Though Smith's plan was never realized, it reinforced her reputation as a cutting edge modernist and urban planner. Smith was a member of the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts from 1967 to 1976. As a founding member of the National Building Museum she helped save the Old Pension Building in Northwest Washington and in

¹⁶ Bushong, 93.

¹⁷ Westbrook, 7.

¹⁸ "Townhouses of Reston." *The Washington Post*. Jan. 1, 1966. p. A12.

¹⁹ Doud, 174-175.

²⁰ "LaClede Town: The Most Vital Town in Town." *Architectural Forum*. Nov. 1968, v. 129, n. 4, p. 57.

²¹ Doud, 161.

²² Clopton, Willard. "Architect Proposes Skyscrapers Around Dupont, Logan Sites." *The Washington Post*. January 7, 1965.

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1989 she was awarded the Centennial Award of the Washington Chapter of the AIA for "continuous service to the chapter, the community and the profession."

History of the Commission

Rose and Henry Miller commissioned the house at 135 South Van Buren Street. The fact that we found no biographical information on these clients is in itself an element of historic significance, as it demonstrates that it was not necessary to be rich or famous, or to navigate in an artistic circle, to commission a modern house in suburban Maryland in the late 1940s. The Millers wanted to hire a well-known architect to build their home. They were advised to select a more affordable local architect who was in the process of establishing a practice.²³ Smith was relatively new to the area and had done little small scale residential work by that time. This house was one of her first suburban homes. 135 South Van Buren Street is the only modern house on the block. Surrounding homes on South Van Buren Street date from the 1920s to the 1960s and are mainly period homes borrowing from historical precedents. Of the over two-dozen homes on South Van Buren Street, only four others were built within five years of 135 South Van Buren Street, and none is designed in a modern style.

Rockville, A Growing City

The city of Rockville saw an increase in population and construction in the years that followed World War II. Rockville saw a population increase of 238.7 percent between 1940 and 1950. Public transportation and improved roadways made commuting easier and families began migrating to Rockville, spurring the need for an increase in suburban housing. In 1929 Rockville's first Athletic Association was organized, marking the first public recreation program in the city. Individual homes were erected by individual clients on vacant lots, as was the case for 135 South Van Buren Street, but most new single- and multi-family housing was speculatively built, in new outlying subdivisions such as Harriett Park, Twinbrook (similar to Levittown), Silver Rock, Rockland, and the Burgundies. Many postwar homes were financed with FHA insured loans or aided by the GI Bill. The sharp increase in residents prompted the city to build four elementary schools in the east side between 1950 and 1956. 135 South Van Buren Street appeared during a time when the city was bursting at its seams with new families and struggling to keep up.²⁴ Rockville was considered a very desirable place to live, as evidenced by the rapid growth of subdivisions and the speed at which young families purchased homes.

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²³ Pickle, James (Current Owner). "Re: Follow-up Questions." Email to Liz Creveling. June 18, 2003.

²⁴ Eileen S. McGuckian. *Rockville: Portrait of a City*. Franklin: Hillsboro Press. 2001. p. 25-59.

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135 South Van Buren Street is a remarkable and totally unchanged example of a small modern house of the 1940s. Its 956-square foot plan is compact, with almost no corridor space, but it is articulated to make interiors look more spacious. Economy of space, a major principle of Modernism, dictates its layout. Living and dining rooms are unified in a single volume, made to look bigger by a sloping ceiling and very large windows on one side. Built-in furniture was also devised to avoid clutter. The multi-purpose entry space can be subdivided with freestanding bookshelves, to be used as a home office or it could be partitioned for use as guest room. This flexible configuration would not have been found in a more traditionally planned house.

Many of the concepts expounded by Smith at 135 Van Buren Street - the flat overhanging roof, large window-walls, the compact, single level plan, the unified living-dining space - were already implemented by Frank Lloyd Wright in his Usonian Houses, the first of which (Herbert Jacobs House, Madison, Wisconsin) was erected in 1936-37. Chloethiel Woodard Smith certainly knew about these houses and she may even have visited one of them, the 1,200 square-foot Pope-Leighey house erected in Falls Church, VA in 1940. Frank Lloyd Wright had also experimented with concrete block construction in his "textile block" houses, built in southern California in the 1920s. Other connections between Wright's houses and 135 Van Buren Street relate to the central location of the fireplace and the indication of its placement on the exterior through a large expanse of brick.

However, contrary to some other young architects of the late 1940s, Smith's take on the Usonian house was far from literal. She seems to have drawn from the work of several progressive architects to create a synthesis of modernist trends all her own. In particular the straightforward and very effective manner in which she contrasted white trim for the windows and the roof overhang with dark wall masses recalls some pre-World War II works by William Wurster.²⁵

135 Van Buren Street belongs to a small group of custom-designed modern homes built in Metropolitan Washington, D.C in the 1940s. Many of them were by architects with whom Smith had established close professional and personal ties: Alfred Kastner (Walter Teichmann House, Kenwood District, Bethesda, 1941),²⁶ Francis Palms, Jr., who subsequently shared office space with her;²⁷ Berla and Abel (Mason Barr, Stanley S. Surrey. Peyton Armstrong Kerr Houses, all in Northern Virginia);²⁸ and Arthur Keyes (Hirschberg House, in fieldstone and wood, 1950-51).²⁹ In terms of size, selection of materials, and finishes, 135 Van Buren Street was more modest than the previously mentioned examples, which makes it all the more significant: generally,

²⁵ See for instance the Calrk Beach House, Aptos, 1937 and the Jensen House, Berkeley, 1937, illustrated in March Treib, ed. *An Everyday Modernism: the houses of William Wurster* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 42 and 46.

²⁶ See *Pencil Points* 23 (February 1942), 78-82

²⁷ *Architectural Forum* 74 (June 1941), 420-421 and *Architectural Record* 90 (November 1941), 70.

²⁸ *Architectural Forum*, August 1946. William H. Hennessy, "Expandable for Growing New Family in Alexandria," *American Home* 39 (January 1948), 56 and Hennessy, William H. *America's Best Small Houses*. New York: The Viking Press, 1949. p. 34-37.

²⁹ *Architectural Record* 110 (November 1951), 135-137.

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clients on as tight a budget as those who commissioned this home would purchase a tract house. However, one house in Glen Echo Heights presents strong commonality with 135 Van Buren Street. As it was designed most likely in 1946 by the Berla and Abel office, one can speculate that Chloethiel Woodard Smith contributed to its design or followed its evolution closely. Located at 5435 Mohican Road, the one-bedroom house was commissioned by painting contractor and chinchilla breeder Stanley Pangborn.³⁰ Exterior walls of cinderblock were plastered; the overhanging roof adopted a single shallow slope. The front facade was extremely understated; in the back, the living room had two fully glazed walls, with mullions creating an attractive geometric composition, which extended to the adjacent, lower screen porch. Beyond was a terrace with a gently curving plan. The fireplace and mantel were built in rough stone, which extended to the entry steps. Ingenious, streamlined built-ins included a dresser in the bedroom and a work desk in the L-shaped kitchen.

An early work of a major architect and urban designer, 135 South Van Buren Street is not mentioned in the master's thesis that Jayne Lisabeth Doud wrote at the University of Oregon, and it does not surface in any other research we have undertaken. It is one of the few Modern Movement homes built in Rockville and, as our research has demonstrated, the earliest of these houses. The house cohabits with its more traditional neighbors, not calling attention to itself, but it also makes a major statement about the simplicity and ease of living in modern homes. 135 South Van Buren Street demonstrates Chloethiel Woodard Smith's talent as a residential designer. It displays her skill at site planning, massing, and interior design, at maximizing available space both inside and outside. Its significance as an example of Modern Movement design is both generic and specific.

³⁰ "Oak Hill - Maryland Chinchilla Ranch," *[The] American Home* 38 (November 1947), 69-71 and Hennessey, *America's Best Small Houses*, 34-37.

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135 South Van Buren Street

Name of Property

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.307 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	Zone	Easting	Northing

3	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	Zone	Easting	Northing

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth A. Creveling- Masters Program in Historic Preservation; . Isabelle Gournay, Associate Professor

Organization University of Maryland, School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation date 1-31-05

street & number School of Architecture, University of Maryland telephone 301-405-6284

city or town College Park state Maryland zip code 20742

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name Pickel, James, et al

street & number 135 South Van Buren Street telephone 301-251-1787

city or town Rockville state Maryland zip code 20850

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et. seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary for the property is identical to that as defined on the tax map and parcel.

Boundary Justification:

This boundary defines the historical property as well as the present day site.

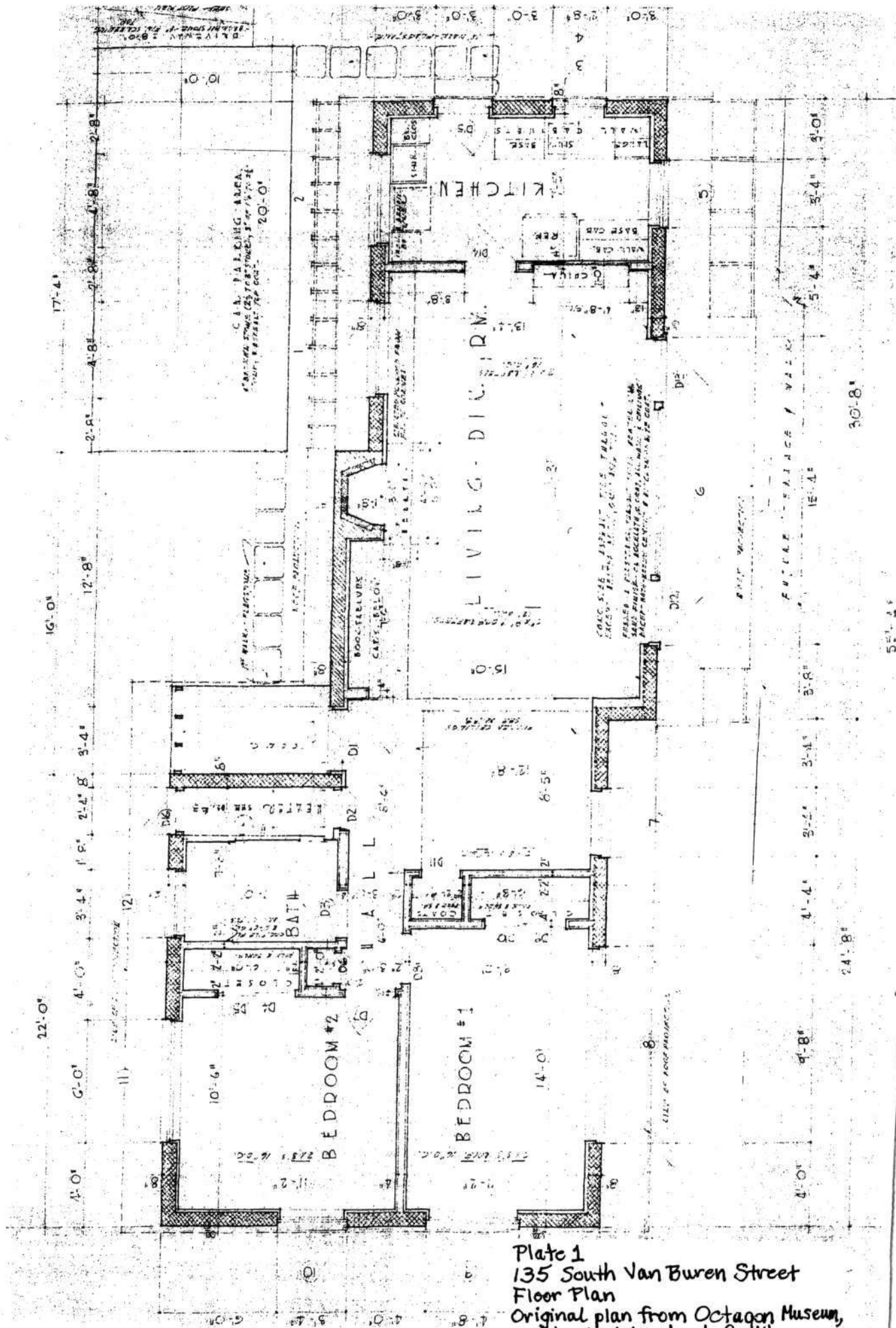
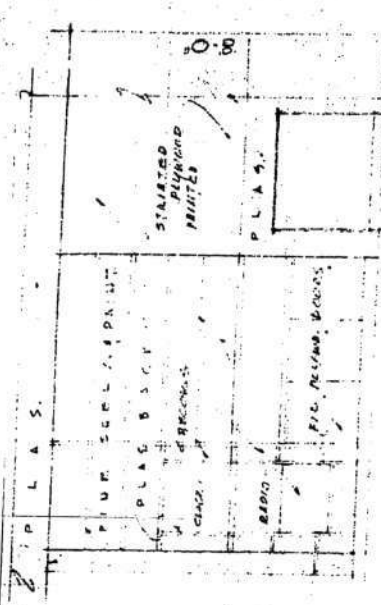
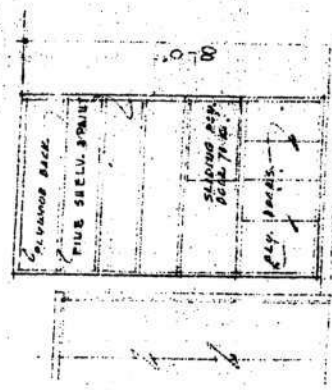


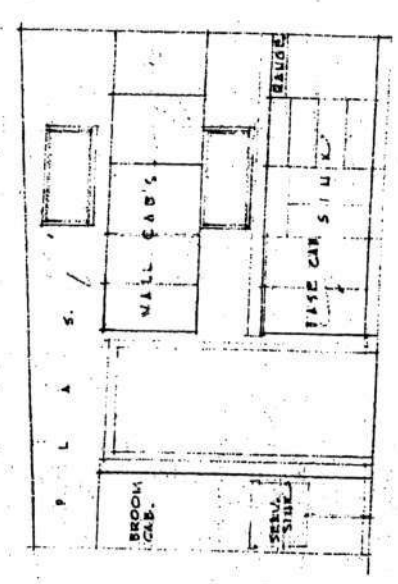
Plate 1
 135 South Van Buren Street
 Floor Plan
 Original plan from Octagon Museum,
 Chloethiel Woodward Smith
 collection M:26-10-96



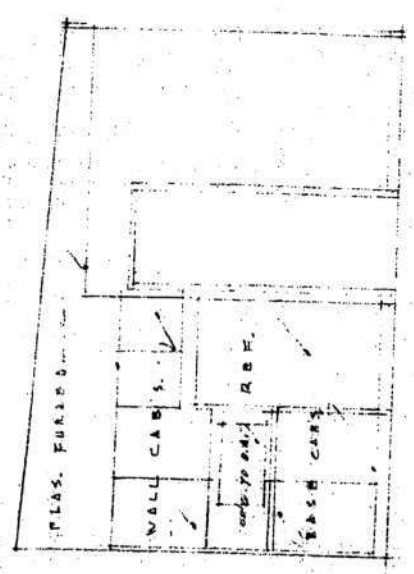
LIVING ROOM



CHINA CAB. IN D.A.

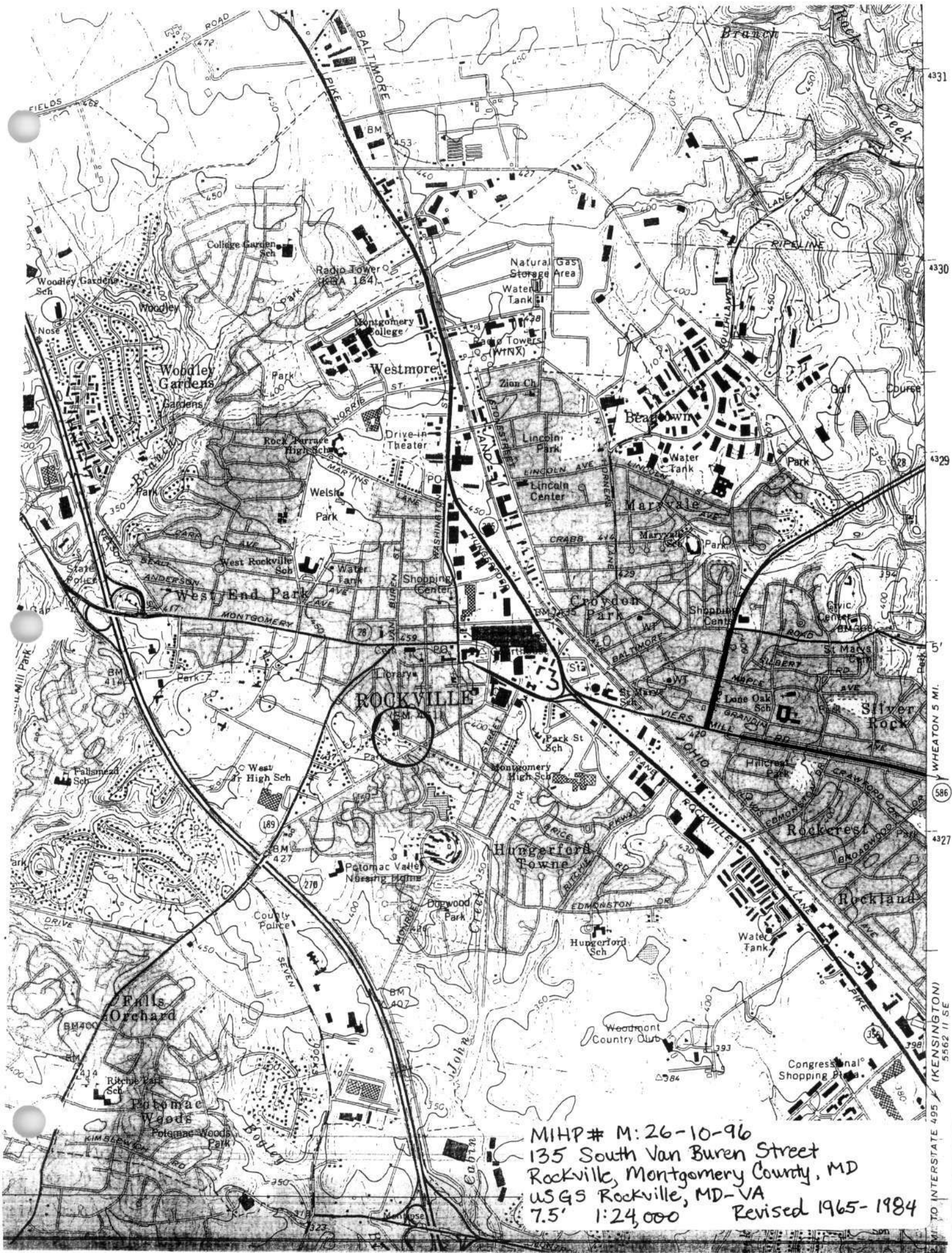


KITCHEN SEC. SOUTH WALL



KITCHEN U. WALL

Plate 2
 135 South Van Buren Street
 Floor Plan
 Original Plan from Octagon Museum,
 Chloethiel Woodward Smith Collection
 M 26-10-96



MIHP# M:26-10-96
 135 South Van Buren Street
 Rockville, Montgomery County, MD
 USGS Rockville, MD-VA
 7.5' 1:24,000 Revised 1965-1984



#33 DA QANXOND NHN- 1 3733

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1029

Chloethiel Woodard Smith House

M-26-10-96

135 South Van Buren Street

Rockville, MD 20850

Maryland Historic
Trust

Montgomery County, MD

Elizabeth Creveling

march 2003

#1

East Facade (facing
S. Van Buren Street)



Chloethiel Woodard Smith House
135 South Van Buren Street
Rockville, MD 20850
Montgomery County, MD

M=26-10-96

Elizabeth Creveling

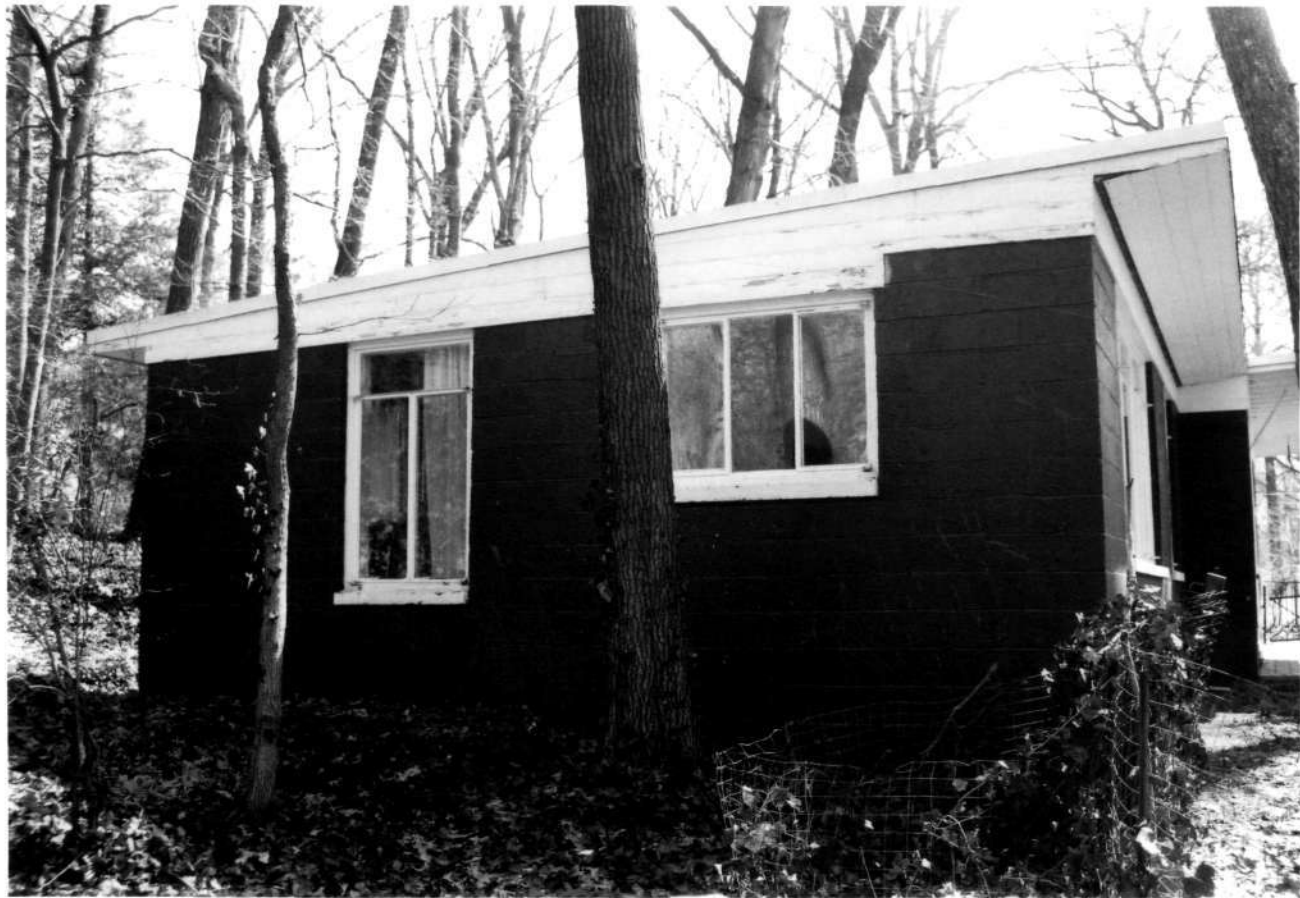
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1025

Cinderblock detail of west facade and window

#2



Chloethiel Woodard Smith House

M: 26-10-96

135 South Van Buren Street

Rockville, MD 20850

Montgomery County, MD

Elizabeth Creveling

007

1030

March 2003

Maryland Historic Trust
North Facade



Chloethiel Woodard Smith House

M:26/10-96

135 South Van Buren Street

Rockville, MD 20850

Montgomery County, MD

Elizabeth Creveling

March 2003

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West Facade

#4



Chloethiel Woodard Smith House

M:26-10-96

135 South Van Buren Street

Rockville, MD 20850

Montgomery County, MD

#33-04 DANKING NNN- 1 3733

Elizabeth Cheveling

March 2003

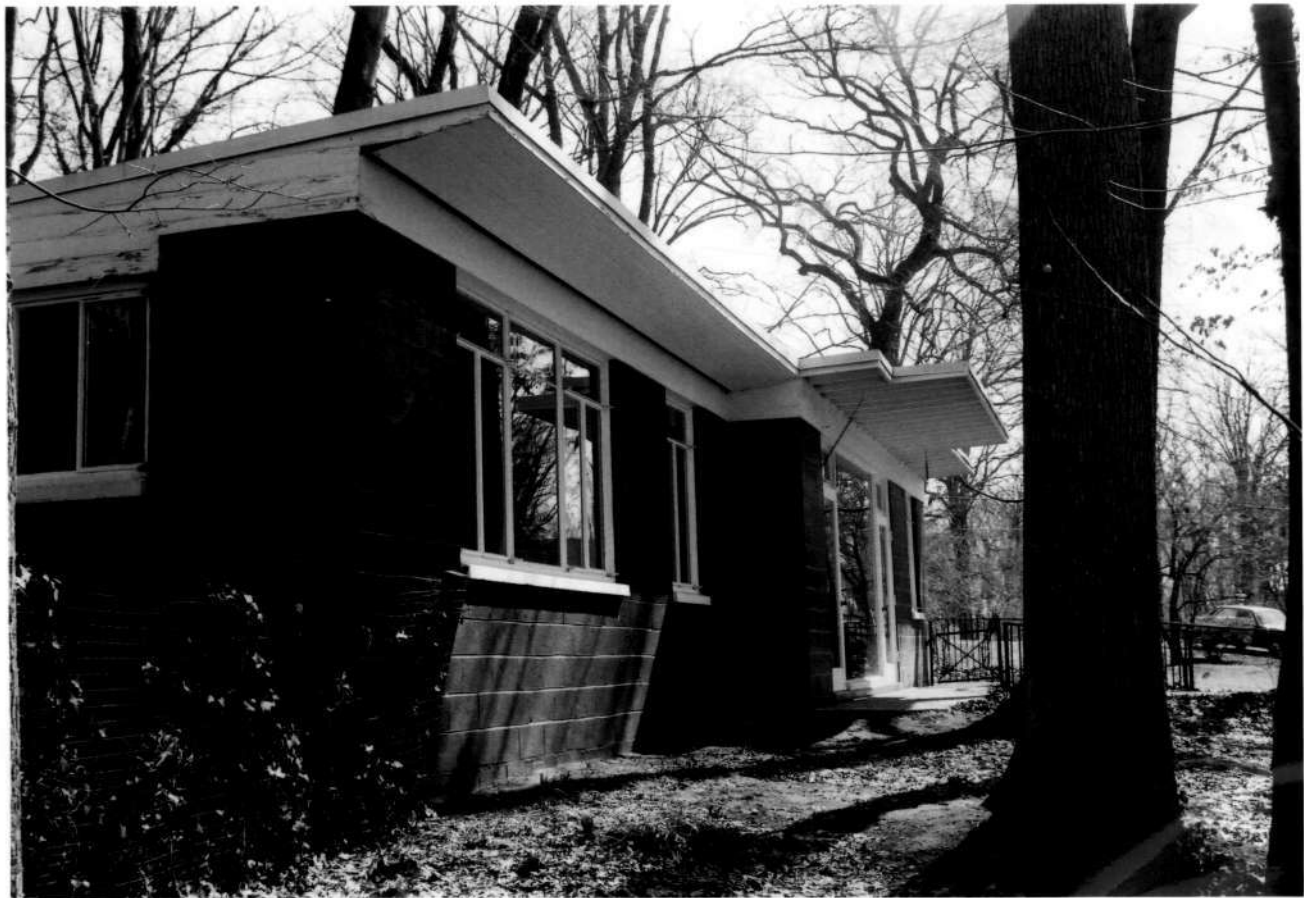
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West facade, Window wall detail

#5



Chloethiel Woodard Smith House
135 South Van Buren Street
Rockville, MD 20850
Montgomery County, MD

M: 26-10-26

Elizabeth Creveling

March 2003

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West Facade, displaying overhang

#6



Chloethiel Woodard Smith House

M:Z6-10-96

Montgomery County, MD

135 South Van Buren Street
Rockville, MD 20850

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South Facade - Kitchen

#7



M:26-10-96

Chloethiel Woodard Smith House
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Rockville, MD 20850
Montgomery County, MD

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South Facade - Storage room

#8